CHAPTER 8

Sexuality

Learning Objectives

- Define sexuality from an anthropological perspective.
- Describe the diversity of human sexuality over time and across cultures.
- Examine the construction of sexuality in the United States.
- Analyze how sexuality and power intersect.
- Assess how globalization is affecting individual expressions and local understandings of sexuality.

At Columbia University's graduation ceremony in May 2015, Emma Sulkowicz lugged a fifty-pound, dark-blue, extra-long twin mattress across the platform to receive her diploma. Carrying the mattress—the kind Columbia uses in its dorms—was the final act of a nine-month-long senior project for her visual arts degree called "Carry That Weight," designed to protest the university's refusal to expel the male student she accused of raping her in her dorm room. She carried the mattress with her wherever she went on campus all year. By her own rules, she was not allowed to ask for help carrying it, though she was allowed to accept help when offered. The *New York Times* art critic Roberta Smith (2014) described the performance as "a woman with a mattress, refusing to keep her violation private, carrying with her a stark reminder of where it took place."

Following Sulkowicz's lead, in October 2014 Columbia students carried twenty-eight mattresses onto campus, one for each of the plaintiffs who had filed a federal Title IX complaint alleging that the university discouraged students from reporting sexual assault, that sanctions were too lenient, and that perpetrators were not removed from campus, leaving survivors to encounter their attackers in dormitories and classrooms. The students were fined $471 to clean up the mattresses left outside the university president's home. Later that month, a group called Carry That Weight organized a national day of action during which students carried mattresses on 130 campuses, joining an increasingly effective anti-rape movement that is working to shatter the silence about widespread sexual assaults on campus.

Surveys reveal that as many as one in five women college students will experience some form of assault (Fisher, Daigle, and Cullen 2010; Hirsch and Khan 2020; Sanday 1990). College administrations are scrambling to address the crisis under the mandate of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which aims to ensure gender equality in federally funded institutions. In September 2014, the University of California instituted an affirmative consent policy for sexual encounters between students on all of its campuses. Such policies, originally pioneered by Antioch College in Ohio in the early 1990s, require more explicit communication between sexual partners, including a clear "yes" at every step of the encounter. This shift in the standard of consent from "no means no" to "only yes means yes" has now been adopted at institutions of higher education across the United States, reflecting a growing effort to bring the resources of educational institutions to bear on the troubled intersection of sexuality and power in American culture.

What are your own experiences of the intersection of sexuality and power? Have you heard stories like Emma Sulkowicz's on your own college campus? In 2017, the hashtag #MeToo went viral on social media as women stepped forward to share their stories of sexual assault and harassment. Within the first twenty-four hours, it had been tweeted 500,000 times and used by 4.7 million people in 12 million posts on Facebook. Community activist Tarana Burke began using the phrase *Me Too* in 2006 to empower women, especially young and vulnerable women, to speak out and change cultural practices, policies, and laws around sexual assault. Its message is: "You are not alone. Don't be ashamed." The 2017 #MeToo movement challenged inappropriate sexual behavior and policies in Hollywood, the music industry, science, academia, politics, sports, medicine, financial services, religion, and the military. The hashtag trended in over 85 countries, and the movement took on life around the world.

Sexuality is a profound aspect of human life, one that stirs intense emotions, deep anxieties, and rigorous debate. The U.S. population holds widely varying views of where sexuality originates, what constitutes appropriate sexual

expression, and what sexuality's fundamental purpose is. It is fair to say that our cultural norms and mental maps of reality are in great flux, and have been for several generations, in response to theological shifts, medical advances, and powerful social movements promoting the equality of women and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals.

Sexuality involves more than personal choices about who our sexual partners are and what we do with them. It is also a cultural arena within which our desires are expressed, socialized, and even thwarted. And it is an arena in which people debate ideas of what is moral, appropriate, and "natural" and use those ideas to create unequal access to society's power, privileges, and resources. Indeed, conflicts about sexuality often intersect with multiple systems of power, including those based on gender, religion, race, class, and kinship.

Anthropologists have a long but uneven history of studying human sexuality. Bronisław Malinowski (1927, 1929) and Margaret Mead (1928, 1935), like other early anthropologists writing in the 1920s and 1930s, considered human sexuality to be key to understanding the cultures they studied, so they wrote extensively about their research findings on human sexuality across cultures. Mead's work with young people in the islands of the western Pacific challenged prevailing norms of gender and sexual expression in the United States, which were assumed to reflect universal traits immutably fixed in nature. Rather, anthropological research began to reveal the vast scope and diversity of human sexuality across time and space and the broad arc of potential human sexual expression.

After World War II, however, anthropological interest turned away from explicit attention to sexuality and focused instead on related issues of marriage, kinship, and the family. Since the 1980s, sexuality has reemerged as a key concern in anthropology (Herdt 1981, 1987; Rubin 1984), paralleling a rise of interest in the wider academic community spurred by the successes of the U.S. women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s, the emergence of gay and lesbian studies in the 1980s (Weston 1993), and the development of queer theory in the 1990s (Boellstorff 2007; Boellstorff and Howe 2015; Weiss 2011). Recently, anthropological scholarship has more intently considered the diverse expressions of sexuality in cultures worldwide, including in Western cultures, and how those expressions are being shaped by the intersection of local practices and globalization.

In this chapter, we examine the extensive body of work that anthropologists have compiled primarily in this latter period. In particular, we consider the following questions:

- What is sexuality and where does it come from?
- What is the scope of human sexuality when seen in a global perspective?

Sexuality is all around us in U.S. culture. Here, a Calvin Klein billboard uses sexuality to sell underwear. Where have you encountered sexuality today?

- How has sexuality been constructed in the United States?
- How is sexuality an arena for working out relations of power?
- How does globalization influence local expressions of sexuality?

By the end of this chapter, you should have a broader understanding of the vast diversity of human sexuality across cultures. You should be able to discuss the roles of nature and culture in shaping human sexuality. Furthermore, you should be able to recognize how norms of sexuality are created and used to control people's bodies and desires and to organize the way cultures work. And you should be able to incorporate anthropological insights as you seek to better understand the role of sexuality in your own life and in your relations with others.

What Is Sexuality and Where Does It Come From?

» Define sexuality from an anthropological perspective.

Text three friends and ask them to define *sexuality*. You will most likely get three very different responses. Perhaps this is not surprising in a culture where sexuality is omnipresent but rarely discussed carefully. In 1998, U.S. president Bill Clinton famously said of his liaison with White House intern Monica Lewinsky, "I did not have sexual relations with that woman." He chose those words presumably because he and Lewinsky had not had intercourse. But did they have sex? Such careful word choice by a sitting president giving testimony under oath reveals the challenges of defining behavior that is not only a physiological process but also a cultural construction whose meaning can vary widely.

Consider the following data. A 1999 survey of college students at a large midwestern university asked: "Would you say you 'had sex' with someone if the most intimate behavior you engaged in was . . . ?" The survey results showed that even college students do not agree about what *having sex* means. Kissing (2 percent) and petting (3 percent) clearly did not constitute having sex for almost all respondents. Oral "sex" (40 percent) constituted sex for many but not most. For 20 percent of respondents, perhaps influenced by dominant heterosexual norms, anal penetration did not constitute having sex. Fully 99.5 percent of respondents indicated that vaginal intercourse did constitute having sex (Sanders and Reinisch 2006). As this study shows, even within one population group—in this case, college students at one university—there can be disagreement over the meaning of the most physical aspects of sexual relations.

For the purposes of this chapter, we will define **sexuality** from two key perspectives. First, sexuality is the complex range of desires, beliefs, and behaviors

sexuality: The complex range of desires, beliefs, and behaviors that are related to erotic physical contact, and the cultural arena within which people debate what kinds of physical desires and behaviors are right, appropriate, and natural.

that are related to erotic physical contact, intimacy, and pleasure. Second, sexuality is the cultural arena within which people debate ideas of what kinds of physical desires and behaviors are morally right, appropriate, and "natural" and use those ideas to create unequal access to status, power, privileges, and resources.

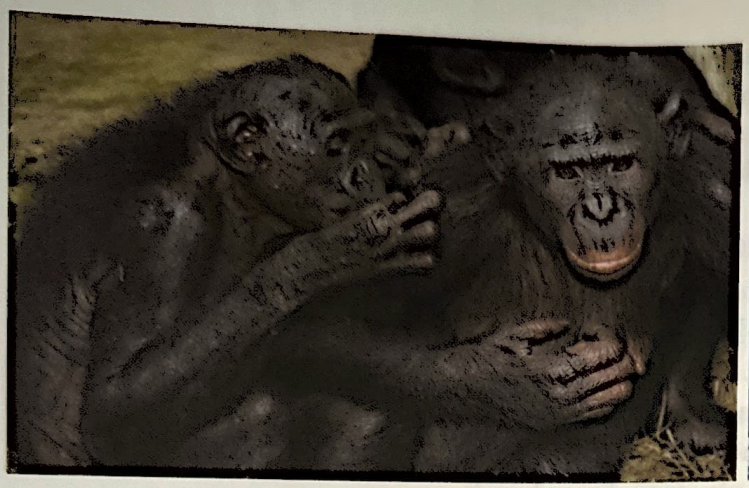
"Birds Do It, Bees Do It": The Intersection of Sexuality and Biology

A famous 1928 Broadway show tune by Cole Porter asserts, "Birds do it, bees do it. Even educated fleas do it. Let's do it, let's fall in love." Is it really that simple? Clearly, biology plays a key role in shaping sexuality, for sexuality includes distinct physiological processes. But how much of human sexuality is shaped by our nature? As we will see, exactly how our genetic inheritance shapes our desires, attractions, identities, practices, and beliefs is quite complicated and subject to heated debate.

People sometimes think that sexuality is the most "natural" thing in the world. After all, every species must reproduce or face extinction, right? Therefore, many assume that the sexual instincts and behaviors of other animals provide an indication of the natural state of human sexuality unencumbered by the overlays of culture.

Yet research reveals that human sexuality is actually a distinct outlier in the animal kingdom. In his article "The Animal with the Weirdest Sex Life" (1997), scientist and author Jared Diamond suggested that human sexuality is completely abnormal by the standards of the world's estimated 8.7 million animal species and 5,400 mammal species. Diamond identified many ways in which humans differ from most other mammals:

- Most other mammals live individually, not in pairs, and meet only to have sex. They do not raise children together, and usually the males do not recognize their offspring or provide paternal care. In contrast, most humans engage in long-term sexual partnerships and often co-parent the couple's joint offspring.
- Most mammals engage in public sex, whereas humans, as a rule, have sex in private.
- Most mammals have sex only when the females of the species ovulate, at which time they advertise their fertility through visual signals, smells, sounds, and other changes in their behavior. Human women, however, may be receptive to sex not only during ovulation but also at other times during their menstrual cycle.
- Humans are one of the few species to have sex face to face.
- Possibly most intriguing, humans, dolphins, and bonobos (a species of ape) are the only mammals that have sex for fun rather than exclusively for reproduction. In fact, in contemporary U.S. culture, humans seem to do it mostly for fun.



Bonobos, dolphins, and humans are the only mammals that have sex for fun rather than exclusively for procreation.

By the standards of most mammals (including great apes, to whom we are most closely related), we humans are the sexual outliers. Despite the common belief that clues to the essentials of human sex drives and behaviors may be found in "nature," Diamond makes clear that humans have developed a sex life that lies far outside the natural framework of that of our mammal relatives. If other animals' sex lives do not provide clues to the roots of our sexuality, what can human biology tell us about the genetic and hormonal roots of sexual desire and sexual behavior?

One school of thought, which draws heavily on evolutionary psychology, focuses on the ways in which human evolution has created biological drives that are embedded in the genes that shape the human brain and control the body's hormones. These drives work automatically—instinctively—to ensure the reproduction of the species. Human sexuality is thought to rely heavily on the expression of these biological drives (Buss [1994] 2016).

Physical anthropologist Helen Fisher draws on many of these ideas to explore the complex biological roots of human sexuality in her book *Why We Love: The Nature and Chemistry of Romantic Love* (2004), particularly the relationship of body chemistry to human sensations of love. Fisher suggests that through evolution, humans have developed a set of neurochemicals that drive an "evolutionary trajectory of loving" (93). These neurochemicals guide us through three distinct phases of falling in love: finding the right sexual partner, building a relationship, and forming an emotional attachment that will last long enough to raise a child. First, testosterone—found in all people—triggers the sense of excitement, desire, arousal, and craving for sexual gratification that we call "lust." Then, our bodies release the stimulant dopamine, and possibly norepinephrine and serotonin, to promote the feelings of romance that develop as relationships deepen. Eventually, the hormones oxytocin and vasopressin generate the feelings of calm and security that are associated with a long-term

partnership; Fisher calls these feelings "attachment." These phases, she suggests, are built into our biological systems to ensure the reproduction of the human species, and they play key roles in shaping human sexuality.

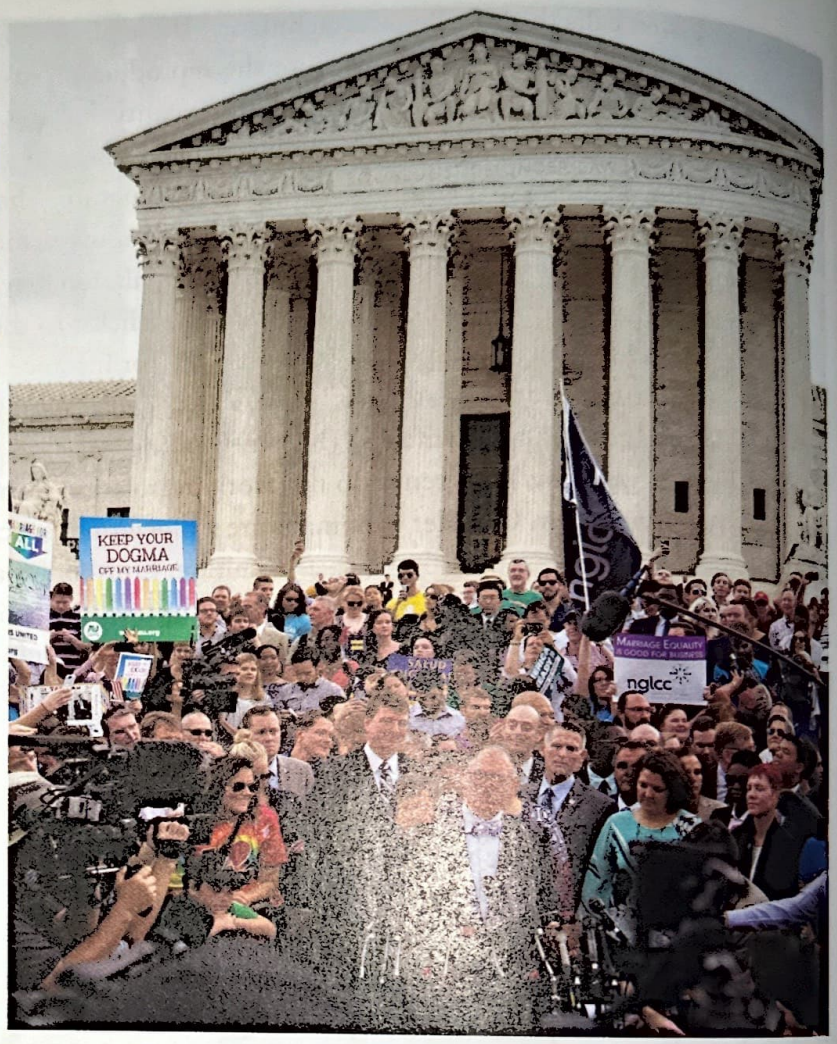
Despite remarkable developments in genetic science, including the ability to map the human genome (the whole human genetic structure), there are limits to its ability to predict individual human behavior, including sexual behavior. Yes, the frequency of certain behaviors in the human population may suggest an underlying biological component. But it is extremely difficult to directly trace links between specific genes and specific behaviors. So, for instance, geneticists have not been able to identify a "straight" gene, a "gay" gene, or any cluster of genes that determines sexual orientation (Fausto-Sterling 2012).

Furthermore, we know that genes do not work in isolation from their surroundings. As discussed in Chapter 2, humans are a biocultural species, shaped by the interaction of genes, environment, and culture. Our bodies and minds, which are not fully formed at birth, bear the imprint of this interaction. Beginning in the womb, our genes interact with the nutrients, sounds, emotions, and diseases that surround and infuse us. The exact effects of the interaction of biology, culture, and environment are extremely difficult to measure, and this is particularly true in relation to complex human sexual desires and behaviors.

Even within the parameters of Fisher's study, we cannot predict a particular man's level of sexual desire for a particular partner by measuring his level of testosterone. Attraction, desire, and even lack of interest are not only biologically driven but also triggered by a vast array of cultural factors—including responses to the potential partner's age, religion, class, race, education, and employment prospects—or previous positive or negative experiences that may shape the body's physiological response to certain stimuli. So, although biology clearly plays a role in human sexuality, exactly how it manifests itself in each individual and how it interacts with the environment and culture is not as clear as many popular descriptions of sexuality suggest.

Sexuality and Culture

A second school of thought, one we will consider in more detail throughout the rest of this chapter, focuses on the ways in which the people, events, and physical and cultural environments around us shape—or construct—our sexual desires and behaviors. These feelings and actions may have roots in human evolution, but they are shaped by our experiences and surroundings. For instance, humans are enculturated from birth to channel sexual feelings and desires into a limited number of acceptable expressions. Culture shapes what people think is natural, normal, and even possible. Parents, family, friends, doctors, religious communities, sex education classes, the media, and many other individual and institutional actors all play a role in shaping how we imagine and express our



How do people, events, and the cultural environment around us shape our sexual desires and behaviors? (*Clockwise from top left*) Advertisements featuring sex and love; plaintiff Jim Obergefell speaks on June 26, 2015, after the U.S. Supreme Court rules that same-sex couples have a constitutional right to marry; a sex education class at Highland School District in Yakima, Washington.

sexuality and what those expressions mean to others. Thus culture both guides and limits, encourages and thwarts our sexual desires and imaginations.

Anthropologists also trace the ways in which, through culture, human groups arrange the diversity of human sexuality into a limited number of categories that are imagined to be discrete (such as gay and straight), thereby masking the actual diversity and fluidity of human expressions of sexuality. Where an individual is assigned within these categories has direct consequences for their life chances. The meanings that certain sexual desires and behaviors acquire in a particular culture may affect people's access to social networks, social benefits, jobs, health care, and other resources and can make people vulnerable to discrimination, marginalization, and violence (Harding 1998; Ore 2010).

Anthropologist Gayle Rubin's pathbreaking 1984 article "Thinking Sex" explores the ways in which power and inequality are built into cultural constructions of sex. Who can you have sex with? Where, when, and how? In

the United States, for example, many political and religious efforts are seeking to constrict the moral and legal boundaries of acceptable sexuality. Consider contemporary debates about bathroom use, censorship of "sexually obscene" library books, resistance to sex education in schools, warnings against premarital sex, contraception restrictions on those who are sexually active, and abortion restrictions on those who become pregnant. By marginalizing and disciplining sexual behavior considered by some to be promiscuous, deviant, and dangerous, these actions unequally privilege some and disadvantage others, often with disastrous effect.

Unequal allocation of power and privilege, Rubin argues, is created by drawing a line, a mental map of reality, between "good" and "bad" sex and imposing consequences for crossing that line. As examples, she notes the cultural lines drawn and enforced between sexual behavior that is between partners of the same gender or opposite genders; marital or non-marital; monogamous or promiscuous; reproductive or nonprocreative; noncommercial or commercial; coupled, masturbatory, or in groups; relational or casual; within the same generation or across generational lines; at home or in public; without pornography or with pornography; without fetish objects or with fetish objects; without sex toys or with sex toys; aligned with conventional sex roles or unusual sex roles. Some of these lines have been shifting in U.S. culture as the country has become more broadly accepting of same-sex marriage and sexuality. Where have you seen these lines moving? Where do you draw the lines? Rubin notes that what is usually considered good, safe, healthy, mature, and legal sex often reflects only a small portion of human sexual capacity.

It is important to note that the perspectives of evolutionary biology and cultural constructionism discussed in this section need not be mutually exclusive. Rather, they reflect different research emphases into the roots and contemporary expressions of human sexuality.

What Is the Scope of Human Sexuality When Seen in a Global Perspective?

» Describe the diversity of human sexuality over time and across cultures.

A look at human sexuality over time and across cultures reveals significant diversity in (1) how, where, when, and with whom humans have sex and (2) what certain sexual behaviors mean. This diversity challenges Western culture-bound notions and suggests ways of reinterpreting assumed cultural categories of sexuality. The discussions that follow offer examples of alternative constructions of sexuality in Suriname, Nicaragua, and Japan.

MAP 8.1
Suriname

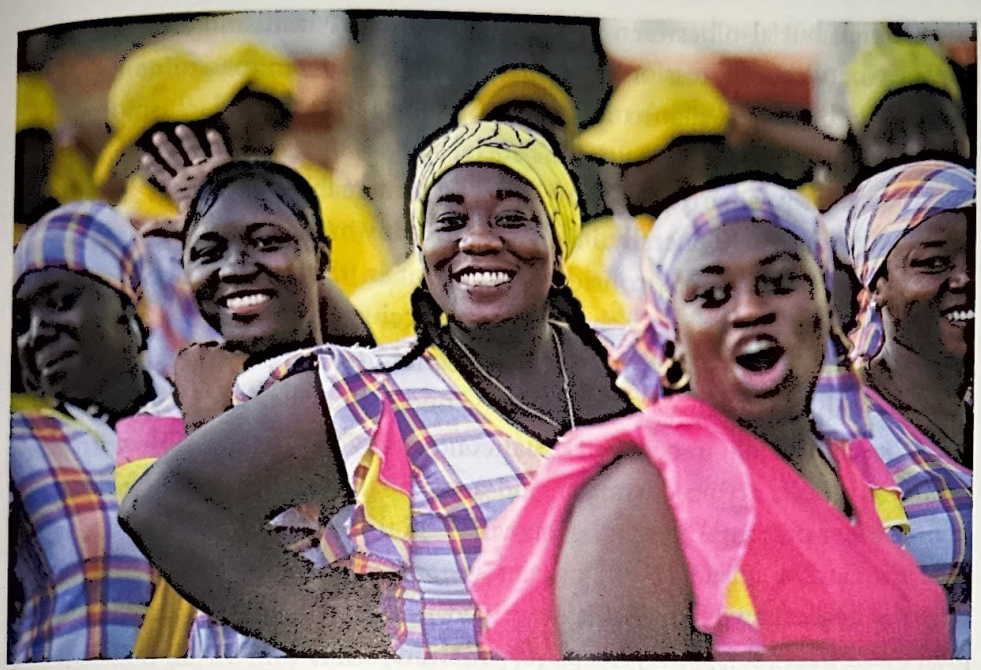
Same-Gender "*Mati* Work" in Suriname

In *Politics of Passion* (2006), cultural anthropologist Gloria Wekker explores the lives of Black, working-class Creole women in the port city of Paramaribo, Suriname, a former Dutch colony on the northern coast of South America. Writing about the sexual choices Surinamese women make, Wekker (like Roger Lancaster and Anne Allison, whose work we will encounter later in this chapter) challenges the dominant thinking about sexual identity in Western scholarship and social movements by describing a much more flexible and inclusive approach specific to the local Paramaribo context.

Wekker's study focuses on *mati*—women who form intimate spiritual, emotional, and sexual relationships with other women. Wekker estimates that three out of four working-class Black women in Paramaribo engage in "*mati* work" at some point in their lives, establishing relationships of mutual support, obligation, and responsibility with other women—sometimes living in the same household, sometimes separately, and often sharing the responsibilities of child rearing. In contrast to Western notions of fixed, "either/or" sexual identities, *mati* may engage in sexual relationships with both women and men—sometimes simultaneously, sometimes consecutively. Their relationships with men may center on having children or receiving economic support, but frequently *mati* choose a "visiting" relationship rather than marriage in order to maintain their independence.

Born in Suriname and trained as an anthropologist in the United States and the Netherlands, Wekker also writes about the transfer of *mati* work to the Netherlands. In recent decades, young Surinamese women have emigrated from the former colony to its former colonizer in search of economic opportunities. There, *mati* work frequently takes the form of relationships between young immigrants and older Black women of Surinamese parentage who have established Dutch citizenship. Wekker describes these relationships as often fraught with complicated power dynamics involving differential age, class, and citizenship status. Yet she notes that this *mati* work does not parallel European ideas of lesbianism.

Wekker pursues this distinction between conceptualizations of sexuality in Suriname and Europe in greater detail as she develops her analysis of *mati* work in Paramaribo. What steps, she asks, must anthropologists take to understand same-gender sexual relationships cross-culturally without distorting what these relationships mean in people's actual lives? Wekker argues that Western scholarship mistakenly links all sexual acts between individuals of the same gender to a notion of "homosexual identity"—a permanent, stable, fixed sexual core or essence, whether inborn or learned, that is counterposed to an equally fixed and opposite heterosexual identity. In the Western framework, a person is either/or. The *mati* of Paramaribo, Wekker argues, approach their sexual choices very



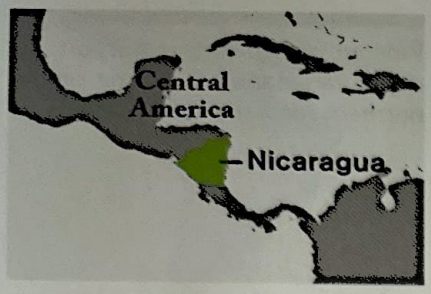
Women join a parade in the port city of Paramaribo, Suriname, on the northern coast of South America.

differently, regarding sexuality as a flexible behavior rather than a fixed identity. Their behavior is dynamic, malleable, and inclusive—both/and—rather than exclusive.

Wekker urges students of sexuality to not impose Western views about sexuality—what she considers "Western folk knowledge"—on the rest of the world but to understand local realities of sexuality with the goal of rethinking same-gender behavior in cross-cultural perspective. She recommends focusing attention on the variation of people's behaviors rather than imagining one uniform expression of same-gender sexual behavior. Furthermore, thinking cross-culturally, she argues that research and analysis of same-gender sexuality must recognize that identical physical sexual acts between same-gendered people may be understood in multiple ways and have vastly different social significance in different cultures and historical periods (Brown 2007; Stone 2007; Wekker 2006, 1999).

Machismo and Sexuality in Nicaragua

Cultural anthropologist Roger Lancaster explores similar themes in *Life Is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua* (1994), in which he considers expressions of sexuality in a working-class neighborhood in Managua, Nicaragua, during the 1980s. In particular, he examines the concept of machismo—which can be defined as a strong, sometimes exaggerated performance of masculinity. This concept, which Lancaster sees as central to the Nicaraguan national imagination, shapes relationships not only between men



MAP 8.2
Nicaragua

and women but also between men and other men. Machismo creates a strong contrast between aggression and passivity. "Real" men—masculine men—are aggressive. But a real man's macho status is always at risk. Machismo must be constantly performed to retain one's social status.

Lancaster was particularly intrigued by how machismo affects sexual relations between men. Generally, in U.S. culture, any man who engages in a same-gender sexual behavior is considered gay. But in the Nicaraguan community that Lancaster studied, only the men who receive anal intercourse are pejoratively called *cochon*—"queer, gay." The *machista*, the penetrator, is still considered a manly man—an *hombre-hombres*—under the rules of machismo. For it is the *machista*'s role to achieve sexual conquest whenever possible with whoever is available, acting out machismo and enhancing his status by dominating a weaker person. Among Nicaraguan men, the intersection of sexuality and power creates a culturally constructed system of arbitrary and unequal value for male bodies in which machismo privileges the aggressive, assertive *machista* penetrator over the passive, receptive, penetrated *cochon*.

Lancaster points out that in Nicaragua, the same acts that in the United States would be seen to reveal one's "essential" sexual orientation are interpreted differently. In fact, active, aggressive men enhance their masculinity and macho status even if they engage in same-gender sexual activity (Lewin 1995; Perez-Aleman 1994; Rouse 1994).

Sexuality and Pleasure in Corporate Japan

In Tokyo's fashionable Roppongi district, elegant hostess bars attract groups of white-collar "salary men" for evenings of high-priced entertainment organized and paid for by their employers at elite Japanese corporations (who may spend up to 5 percent of company budgets on entertainment). These are not sex clubs, but they are still part of the commercialized sex industry—only selling the idea of sex, not physical sex. In her ethnography *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club* (1994), anthropologist Anne Allison draws on four months of fieldwork in one club to explore the relationship between sexuality, masculinity, and Japan's capitalist corporate culture. At the clubs, hostesses serve as the focal point of the party. They pour drinks, light cigarettes, flatter, and banter to enhance the clients' pleasure. Discussion of the hostess is also a central feature of the party, as men engage in sexual banter and innuendo about her personal and physical attributes, especially her breasts.

MAP 8.3
Tokyo

Despite the highly charged sexual atmosphere at the club, Allison suggests that corporate trips to hostess clubs are not primarily about sex. Rather, gathering in these spaces—outside the office and outside the home and family life—is about stimulating and channeling the men's sexual desire in the service of strengthening corporate culture and office relationships. All the talk

about breasts is not about heterosexuality but about building homosocial relationships with other men. Sexual innuendo transforms women hostesses into sexual objects—a status seemingly all men agree on—and turns men's laughter and banter into a unifying process of male identity construction and bonding. Ideally, difference and discord in the workday can be dissolved into sexual conversation after hours. Allison suggests that in the highly ritualized expression of male dominance and male privilege performed in the hostess bars, the service purchased is not the eroticization of the woman but the eroticization of the men. The hostess does not deliver a sex act but through her banter, service, and submissive role instead projects an image of the potent and pleasing man who is powerful and desirable. Ultimately, this nightwork—whether performed by the hostess or by the men desperately attempting to have fun in an atmosphere of forced camaraderie and pretend sexuality long after the regular workday is over—fosters a particular form of masculinity, corporate masculinity, that serves the interests of contemporary Japanese businesses by channeling men's sexuality and desire into work (Curtis 1996; Davidson 1997; Ogasawara 1995).

How Has Sexuality Been Constructed in the United States?

» Examine the construction of sexuality in the United States.

The studies discussed throughout this chapter reflect what anthropologist Kath Weston has called the vast ethnocartography of human sexuality (Weston 1993). As we turn our attention to the United States, research reveals the uniquely Western cultural history of a dual-category system of describing sexual orientation. In recent years, scholarship of race and racism in the United States has turned its attention to the historical and contemporary construction of the category of Whiteness, a process central to the formation of U.S. racial stratification. In a similar way, the anthropology of sexuality in the United States has turned its attention to the historical and contemporary construction of heterosexuality (D'Emilio and Freedman 1998).

The Invention of Heterosexuality

Historian Jonathan Katz (2007) argues that heterosexuality as it is practiced and understood in contemporary U.S. culture is a fairly recent invention. The *Oxford English Dictionary Supplement* lists the first U.S. usage of the term in 1892. Because words provide clues to cultural concepts, Katz suggests that the lack of earlier citations in popular or scientific sources in the United States indicates that the idea of heterosexuality had not achieved widespread cultural currency in the nineteenth century.

Does this mean that women and men in the United States were not engaging in opposite-gender sexual activity before the invention of this word? Katz suggests instead that heterosexuality as we think of it is not the same as reproductive intercourse between a man and a woman. Instead, what we call "heterosexuality" today is a particular arrangement between the sexes that—although not excluding reproductive intercourse—involves ideas about the practice and purpose of sex that have not always been socially authorized. For instance, early references to heterosexuality often described it as a perversion of the natural order because of its association with sex for pleasure rather than for procreation. The nineteenth-century Victorian ideal of sexuality, heavily influenced by Christian teachings, considered sex to be for procreation alone. Sex for pleasure represented a danger to the purposes of God. Masturbation—clearly nonprocreative—was considered a life-threatening, depleting form of self-abuse.

Only in 1892 did the translation of German psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing's influential work *Psychopathia Sexualis* first introduce to the U.S. scene the modern sense of heterosexuality as erotic feelings for the opposite sex and "homosexuality" as erotic feelings for the same sex. This marked a significant shift in the scientific community, supported by a growing number of medical doctors, toward the new idea of sexuality for pleasure rather than exclusively for procreation.

Sexology A scientific study of sexuality, called *sexology*, began to emerge in Europe and the United States in the late nineteenth century. This field of study played a central role in the establishment of heterosexuality as the dominant erotic ideal and in the gradual process of dividing the population into distinct heterosexual and homosexual groups. Twentieth-century studies led by Alfred Kinsey, William Masters and Virginia Johnson, and Shere Hite used interviews, questionnaires, observation, and participation to explore the sexual lives of thousands of primarily White U.S. residents. Their studies produced surprising results. Kinsey and later sexologists found that human sexuality did not fit into simplistic categories. Same-gendered attraction, fantasies, and experiences were much more common than previously thought. Furthermore, sexual behaviors could shift over the course of a lifetime, spanning both same-gender and opposite-gender sexual activity. Rather than finding a sharp dichotomy between

Sex researchers William Masters and Virginia Johnson, pictured here interviewing a couple in 1969, challenged common assumptions about U.S. sexual practices.

heterosexuality and homosexuality, research revealed diversity, flexibility, and fluidity along a continuum of sexual behavior (Hubbard 1990; Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin 1948).

Despite their arguments for the recognition of diversity and fluidity in human sexual behavior, sexology studies reinforced the emerging popular and scientific consensus that because it was the sex most people were having, heterosexuality was the functional norm for human sexuality (Hubbard 1990; Katz 2007).

Over the course of a century, heterosexuality gradually came to be seen as the norm—the presumed "natural" state—against which to judge all other expressions of sexuality. Today, cultural notions of sexuality are in flux, yet a particular version of heterosexuality continues to be constructed and contested.

White Weddings

White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture (2008), by sociologist Chrys Ingraham, is not a book about wedding ceremonies. It is about wedding culture and what Ingraham calls the "wedding industry"—the vast network of commercial activities and social institutions that market 2.2 million weddings a year in the United States. The wedding industry and wedding culture, Ingraham argues, provide insights into how U.S. culture gives meaning to marriage and, in the process, constructs contemporary understandings of heterosexuality.

Constructing Heterosexuality It's hard to turn on the television, go online, or check out at the local grocery store without encountering some reminder of U.S. society's fascination with weddings. Bridal magazines, popular tabloids, television shows, and commercials in every medium saturate the culture with images of spectacles of excess that will, they promise, lead to everyone's fairy-tale ending of happily ever after. Wedding consultants push wedding announcements, bridal showers, wedding halls, floral arrangements, diamond rings, rehearsal dinners, receptions, gifts and favors, caterers, photographers, bands, limousines, and glamorous honeymoons to romantic destinations. Wedding registries orchestrate the delivery of just the right gifts of kitchenware, china, household furnishings, and every appliance imaginable. The average bridal gown (mostly made in third-world garment shops by women who will never have a white wedding), including

What is your idea of a perfect wedding? Here, a woman adjusts a bridal gown at a wedding fair in Bucharest, Romania, where the wedding industry has grown despite an economic crisis.

alterations, headpiece, and veil, will cost $1,259. In 2022, the average U.S. couple will spend more than $30,433 on their big day. Altogether, the annual $70 billion wedding industry wields enormous social and economic power (Wedding Stats 2022).

Ingraham reminds her readers that brides are not born. They are made. Every girl in U.S. culture, almost from birth, is bombarded with cultural symbols and messages about what it will take to have her very own white wedding. Barbie dolls and other toy-industry favorites model the perfect bride, complete with accessories (including Ken?) for the perfect white wedding. Disney movies, feature films, and television shows celebrate weddings as key life moments (and central plot devices) and essential cultural symbols. Every broadcast season features a spate of elaborate made-for-television weddings, especially on shows struggling in the ratings.

From childhood, girls are tutored in preparation for the "you may kiss the bride" moment, learning to apply makeup, wear high heels, send valentines, go on dates, and select a prom dress. Boys learn to buy flowers and corsages, wear tuxedos, pay for dates, lead during the first dance, buy an engagement ring, and initiate sex. But no matter where you think human sexuality originates, it is clear that these behaviors do not occur in nature. They are constructed in culture. Through the wedding industry and wedding culture, Ingraham suggests, we learn what it means to be heterosexual.

Inequality and Unequal Access What do weddings tell us about the construction of heterosexuality in U.S. culture? Building on recent feminist scholarship, Ingraham suggests that white weddings, and the marriages that result, offer insights into the gendered power dynamics embedded in the normative patterns of heterosexuality that have developed since the late nineteenth century. These power dynamics disadvantage women while being largely obscured by the idealism and romance that U.S. culture wraps around these institutions. Historically, the institution of heterosexual marriage included legal stipulations that effectively made women the economic and sexual property of their husbands. This assumption continues to be ritualized in contemporary U.S. weddings by the father "giving away" the bride to her soon-to-be husband, exchanging the woman between two men. Today, patterns of inequality are not legally sanctioned but still significant both in the workplace and in the gendered division of labor in the home.

Ingraham selected the book title *White Weddings* to highlight the issues of class and race that also are embedded in the workings of the wedding industry and the fairy tale of the wedding ritual. White weddings are not available to all. The women sewing wedding dresses, the young men mining diamonds, and the staff serving dinner on the Caribbean honeymoon island cannot afford a white wedding. Nor does the industry depict a diverse population in its advertising, insinuating that white weddings are primarily for White folks. Actually,

most Americans cannot afford the average U.S. wedding; they incur significant debt for the ceremony and the honeymoon to launch their marriage (Ingraham 2008; Milkie 2000; Siebel 2000).

Lesbian and Gay Commitment Ceremonies

The U.S. Supreme Court legalized same-gender marriage in 2015. In *Recognizing Ourselves* (1998), anthropologist Ellen Lewin opened a window into both the personal and the political dynamics of gay and lesbian commitment ceremonies before they were legalized.

For some couples in Lewin's study, commitment ceremonies, holy unions, and weddings were a form of resistance against the cultural norms and legal standards that denied gay men and lesbians the recognition of their lives and loves. The public performances of these ceremonies allowed them a chance to speak of their anger and sorrow, to refuse to be marginalized and mistreated, and to challenge the dominant patterns of heterosexuality and gender stratification in mainstream U.S. culture. Many also saw their ceremonies as part of the efforts to legalize same-gender marriage and to advocate for the legal, health, and economic benefits associated with heterosexual marriages.

For others, their commitment ceremonies expressed more personal and intimate feelings—a decision to recognize themselves, to celebrate their love, and to call their communities to participate in supporting their relationships. Through public ceremonies long reserved for heterosexual couples, gay men and lesbians declared they were already part of local communities, schools, religious congregations, families, and workplaces—that they belonged.

Today, U.S. marriage patterns, and relationship patterns more generally, are shifting rapidly. Placed in historical perspective and in light of our anthropological perspectives on the fluidity and malleability of human sexuality, perhaps we can view these shifts not as some new and surprising contestation of age-old "natural" patterns but as the most recent rethinking of human sexuality in U.S. culture. If so, we might then be better prepared to analyze the underlying intersections of sexuality and power in our own personal and political lives.

How Is Sexuality an Arena for Working Out Relations of Power?

» Analyze how sexuality and power intersect.

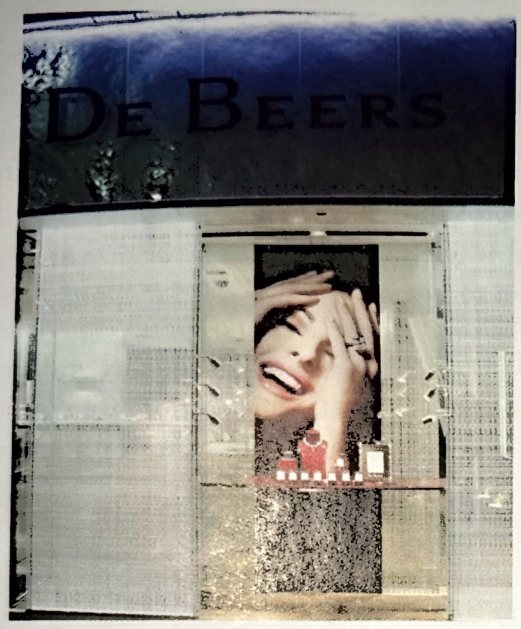
As we have noted, sexuality is more than an expression of individual desires and identities. French philosopher and social scientist Michel Foucault (1978) described sexuality as "an especially dense transfer point for relations of power." By this he meant that in every culture, sexuality—like race, ethnicity, class, and

THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THINGS

Diamonds: Sex, Love, and Status in a Little Rock

How did diamonds—ordinary objects of compressed carbon—become associated with romance, sex, and glamour? Ninety percent of U.S. women own at least one diamond. The United States is the largest diamond market, followed by China and India. Eighty percent of U.S. marriage engagements are sealed with a diamond engagement ring. How do anthropologists make sense of this as we consider cross-cultural expressions of sexuality? Let's consider the social life of diamonds through the work of anthropologist Susan Falls (2014).

1 Diamonds flow through a sprawling global production chain managed by a handful of powerful companies like De Beers of South Africa. Diamonds are hard to find, are difficult to mine, and require sophisticated skills to cut and set into rings, but they generate over $72 billion in annual sales. "Blood diamonds" have been implicated in the purchase of weapons used to fuel civil conflicts in developing nations, but most diamonds are produced, circulated, and marketed legally. Their journey illuminates unequal economic relations between people along the commodity chain, including miners, producers, and consumers.



2 In the early twentieth century, De Beers hired an advertising agency to create an American middle-class market for diamonds. Their strategy was to associate diamonds with glamour, wealth, status, love, sex, and romance. Elaborate campaigns placed diamonds into movies, fashion advertisements, and pop culture books and declared that "A Diamond Is Forever." Wedding brochures promoted diamond rings—of the right size and price—as an essential element of any engagement.

3 Marketing firms have not been able to control the cultural interpretation of diamonds. Everyone who has a diamond ring has their own story to go with it. These unique, dramatic, and creative stories, involving romance, desire, family, gender, sexuality, beauty, love, and loss, resist the mass-marketed, mass-produced, and mass-consumed diamond rings. Instead, these personal stories endow rings with deep meaning and value that reflect the complex web of human relationships and experiences that shape local lives in a global age.

We express ourselves and learn about others in many ways, including through material culture—that is, the things we make and use. Diamond rings, with their high symbolic value, provide insights not only into the processes of global capitalism but also into the local processes and creative strategies we use to express individual and local meaning.

- Ask if your family has a diamond. Can you piece together its biography, its social life? Was it a purchase or a gift? What stories are associated with it, and what does it mean to its owner? Do you know where the diamond came from?
- Do you associate diamonds with love, romance, sexuality, luxury, glamour, or status? Would you expect to give one or receive one at your engagement? Why? How do you see a diamond ring intertwined with sexuality?

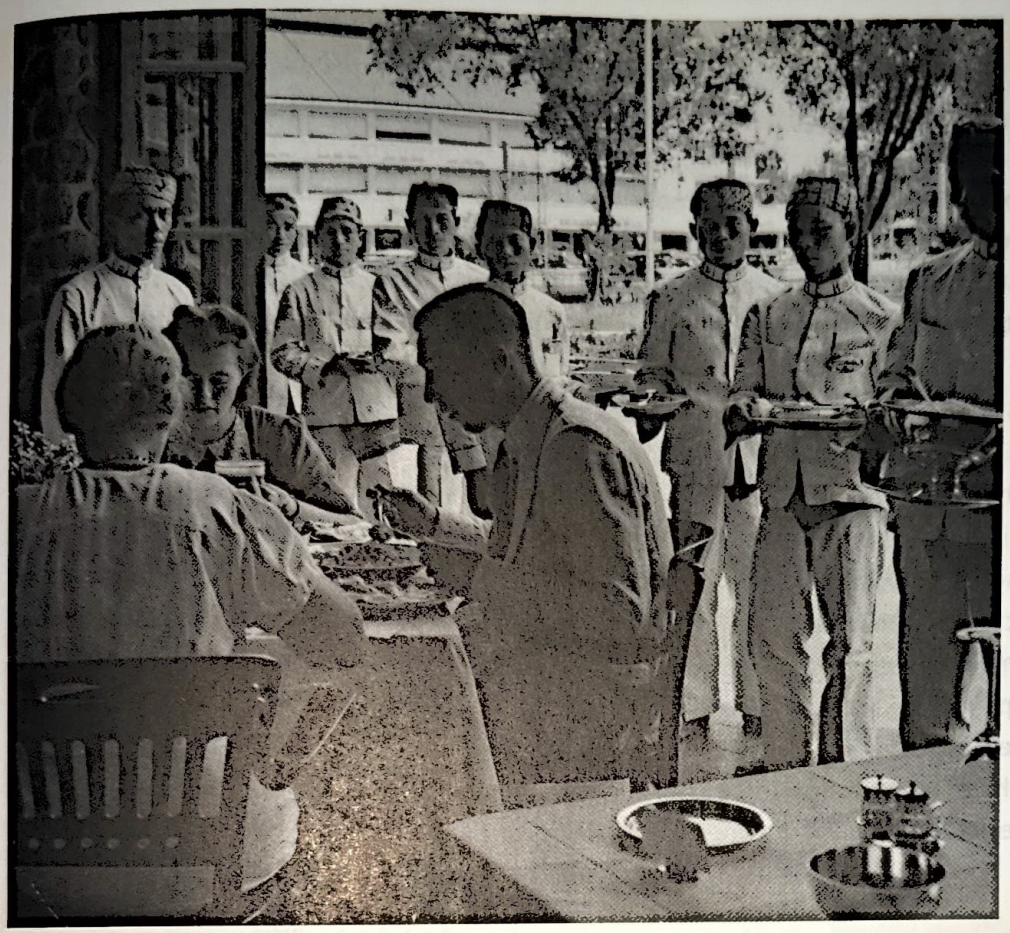
gender—is also an arena in which appropriate behavior is defined, relations of power are worked out, and inequality and stratification are created, enforced, and contested.

Indeed, cultural institutions ranging from governments to religious bodies attempt to regulate many aspects of sexuality, including marriage and divorce; monogamy and polygamy; the age of consent; the definition of incest; reproductive rights; the rights of gay men, lesbians, and bisexual and transgender persons; pornography; and prostitution. A consideration of "who is allowed to do what with whom and when" exposes the intersections of sexuality and power in a culture. Attention to intersectionality—the ways in which systems of power interconnect to affect individual lives and group experiences—offers a fundamental shift in how social scientists study inequality and stratification, including how we think about sexuality. In this section, we consider several case studies that reflect on these intersections both historically and in contemporary life.

Colonialism and Intersections of Sexuality, Race, Class, and Nation

Cultural anthropologist Ann Stoler explores sexuality as an arena for working out power relations. Her book *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* (2010) is a historical study of the ways sexuality served as a tool for enforcing social boundaries under European colonialism. In particular, Stoler explores the strategies that European colonizers used to control the sexual practices, or "carnal knowledge," of people under their rule. By controlling sexuality, colonizers sought to establish clear boundaries of European identity and thereby protect their rights to the profits of colonialism and their privileges as members of what they considered to be the dominant race.

Through extensive historical research on colonial activities from the early 1600s into the twentieth century, Stoler reveals that an understanding of the intersections of sexuality, race, class, and nationality is essential for understanding the colonial enterprise. Questions of "who bedded and wedded whom" were not left to chance in the colonies of Spain, Portugal, France, England, or Holland. Leading corporations such as the Dutch East India Company painstakingly wrote, clarified, and implemented rules for sexual liaisons and marriage relations. For example, from 1622 to 1822, the Dutch restricted the immigration of European women to Asia. European bachelors were recruited as employees but were prohibited from marrying women of the colonies. Instead, they were encouraged to live with—but not marry—enslaved women or native concubines. Colonial legislation ensured that these women, along with the children of their liaisons, would have no right to claim citizenship in the colonial homeland or any rights and privileges as spouses or children of colonial subjects.



Who bedded and wedded whom was not left to chance in European colonies. Physical and social boundaries in all areas of life were hardened to discourage racial mixing of colonists with the colonized, as depicted in this photo, ca. 1940, of a Dutch colonialist family eating in Java, Indonesia, while a group of Indonesian waiters attend to them.

Later, when restrictions on the immigration of European women were lifted, their domestic, economic, political, and sexual lives in the colonies were circumscribed in gender-specific ways. Physical and social boundaries between European women and native men were hardened to discourage racial mixing. Colonized men, in particular, were portrayed as a sexual danger to the racial purity of women of the colonial community, despite the nearly total absence of reports of sexual violence by native men against European women.

Gender-specific sexual sanctions, especially as they related to race, delineated lines of power between European men and women in the colonial endeavor. Colonial administrators considered this strict control of sexual practices crucial to maintaining distinct communities of Europeans with clear racial and class boundaries.

In reality, however, these boundaries were much more complicated, fragile, fractious, and fluid than intended. The children of mixed-race relationships, for instance, posed a challenge to the preferred rules of colonization and threatened to blur the colonial divide. Because all mixed-race children shared some European heritage, decisions about their status as citizens or subjects often hinged on more than their perceived race. Often what mattered most was their

Your Turn: Fieldwork

Attraction: Considering Chemistry, Meaning, and Power

What shapes your sexual desires, your attractions? How do you know who you would desire to have sex with? When I ask my students, inevitably somebody says, "Anybody!" But when we explore this further, it becomes clear that one's sexual desires, or sense of "chemistry," are not solely determined by chemicals—hormones, pheromones, testosterone, and dopamine. Sexual desires arise at the intersection of biology and the elaborate cultural system of meaning and power in which we live.

To explore this intersection, use the following categories to make a list of the characteristics that attract you or inhibit your attraction, that make someone desirable or undesirable as a mate. Perhaps your first thoughts might go to "beautiful," "handsome," or "sexy," but dig a little more to understand what those terms mean to you. Also ask yourself which of these categories are most important to you and why. Consider how your attractions have changed over time, from childhood to youth to college student, and how they might change over the rest of your life. After you have reflected on what shapes your own notion of attraction, discuss your findings with two or three classmates. What most surprised you?

Beauty	Class
Age	Wealth
Gender	Education
Sexual orientation	Legal status
Race	Health
Ethnicity	Hygiene
Religion	Ability or disability
Kinship relationship	Other characteristics?

parents' class position within the colonial enterprise. Many mixed-race children whose parents were of lower-class status were abandoned by the colonial powers. In most cases, however, boundaries between the colonizers and the colonized proved unenforceable. Stoler points out that in the Dutch-controlled colonial territory of Java, nearly 75 percent of those granted European legal status by 1900 were of mixed race, revealing a significant blurring of intended boundaries.

Stoler's analysis of European colonial practices indicates that attitudes toward sexual activity are not always shaped solely by carnal desires. Systems of economic, political, and colonial power exert significant influence on how desires are expressed and understood as sexuality intersects with dynamics of race, class, and nationality.

Intersections of Race and Sexuality for Black Gay Women

Mignon Moore's study *Invisible Families* (2011) explores the impact of the intersection of race and sexuality on the identities, relationships, and families of Black gay women in the United States. Moore notes that, historically, race has framed Black women's political, economic, and religious identities (see also

Dill 1983; Higgenbotham 1992). And whereas many middle-class White lesbian couples experience sexuality as the primary framework that shapes their identity, many in the Black lesbian community (including African American, Afro-Caribbean, and African immigrant women) find that race—perhaps as much as, if not more than, sexuality—is the primary framework that shapes their identity.

In an interview with Moore, Zoe Ferron (a pseudonym), an African American woman born in 1960 in Brooklyn, New York, reflects on how the identities of race, gender, and sexuality describe her:

> If I had to number them one, two, three? Probably Black and lesbian—real close, to be honest with you. I don't know which would come up as one. Probably Black. Woman last. . . . Because that is just what it is. People see your Blackness, and the world has affected me by my Blackness since the very inception of my life. . . . My sexuality is something that developed later on, or I became aware of later on, [because] I think *it's always been what it's been*, but I think that it was just something that developed in my psyche. But being Black is something that I've always had to deal with: racism since day one and recognizing how to navigate through this world as a Black person, and even as a Black woman. (Moore 2012, 33)

A couple share a laugh while playing cards with their daughter and son at home in Chicago, Illinois.

The intersection of race and sexuality becomes particularly meaningful as Black gay women participate in Black or gay communities that define themselves around just one or the other of these identities.

Moore notes that before the 1980s, gay sexuality in communities of color was rarely articulated in public settings. And only infrequently was it recognized as a component of the community's larger experiences of discrimination and struggle. Instead, openly gay sexuality was perceived to flout notions of "respectability"—virtue, modesty, discipline, responsibility—that had developed within the Black middle class and that its leadership promoted as important tools to combat racist stereotypes in the workplace, political arena, and family life (Shaw 1996; Wolcott 2001). Moore points to a strong reluctance during that period on the part of gay Black people to challenge community expectations about respectability by creating families together.

How do the women in Moore's study navigate the Black middle-class politics of respectability in order to both live their sexuality openly and maintain strong community connections? Moore suggests that by risking the disruption of this particular version of respectability, Black women who live openly as lesbians—forming families, getting married, becoming mothers, and raising children—offer an alternative manifestation of respectability at the intersection of sexuality and race.

Can you see how the intersection of race and sexuality may differentially affect one's life choices and opportunities? In your own life, how is your sexuality shaped by its intersection with other systems of power—perhaps age, gender, race, class, or religion?

Sexual Citizens

As discussed at the beginning of the chapter, sexual assault is pervasive on college campuses across the country. Anthropologist Jennifer Hirsch and her colleague Shamus Khan conducted ethnographic research with 150 undergraduate students at Columbia University between 2015 and 2017—including students who self-identified as gay, lesbian, straight, bisexual, trans, queer and asexual—to better understand their sexual lives on campus and to investigate what leads to the widespread incidence of sexual assault. In listening to students' stories and conducting fieldwork on and off campus, Hirsch and Khan learned that 36 percent of women and 15 percent of men had experienced some form of nonconsensual sexual contact by their senior year. Twenty percent of women and 6 percent of men reported having been raped. Previous studies have found that 90 percent of rapes are committed by someone the victim knows, usually a boyfriend, former boyfriend, coworker, classmate, friend, or acquaintance (Fisher, Cullen, and Turner 2000).

Hirsch and Khan's book *Sexual Citizens: A Landmark Study of Sex, Power, and Assault on Campus* (2020) seeks to uncover the deep cultural roots beneath sexual

violence and assault. How are students' experiences shaped and created by their interpersonal relationships, precollege histories, organizations they are a part of, and the surrounding culture? Eliminating assault, Hirsch and Khan argue, will require shifting attention from individual bad actors to the systems that make sexual assault a predictable consequence of how our society is organized—systems that normalize assault and create conditions of vulnerability.

Hirsch and Khan's study reveals that assault happens at a complex intersection of students' sexual projects, their sense of self as sexual citizens, and their physical location within particular sexual geographies. Each person, they suggest, has a *sexual project*, some more developed than others, that answers the question: Why do you want sex? Students' responses cited pleasure, intimacy, connecting with others, acquiring sexual experiences, exploring sexual identity, having children, or achieving social status. Sexual projects are embedded within other projects, like going to college or preparing for work and family life. Despite the significance of sex in students' stories, few had been given any guidance from their family or community about how to think and talk about what they wanted from sexual experiences and what kind of sexual projects fit their values. This vacuum created uncertainty and vulnerability at key moments in their sexual encounters.

Hirsch and Khan's study also examines the impact of particular *sexual geographies*—including the campus design, buildings, college-life areas, residential dorms, access to buildings, access to alcohol, fraternities, Greek-life policies, even furniture. How do the physical spaces through which students move shape their sexual experiences and create conditions of vulnerability that lead to sexual assault? Space influences actions and interactions. What is the effect, for instance, when a dorm room has only one chair and a second person must sit on the bed? Hirsch and Khan urge more careful attention to systemic design features in discussions of sexual assault prevention.

Hirsch and Khan's study also reveals a limited sense of sexual agency or control—what the authors call *sexual citizenship*—among the students. How can a culture, a college, and a country create sexual citizens—that is, individuals with a clear sense of both their right to freely exercise their own sexual projects and their obligation to treat their partner's sexual projects with dignity and respect? Hirsch and Khan's work reveals that sexual encounters occur at the complex intersection of many systems of power—not only gender and sexuality but also age, race, wealth, knowledge of campus, and previous sexual experience. A clear sense of sexual citizenship and self-determination, or lack thereof, significantly affects students' ability to navigate those complicated power dynamics.

Hirsch and Khan recommend that institutions at all levels—the family, school, religion, the university, and the state—devote renewed attention to

Nessette Falu

Black Queer Women's Experiences with Health Care in Brazil

Anthropologist Nessette Falu spent several years in the city of Salvador, Bahia, on Brazil's northwest coast researching the challenges facing Black queer women as they navigate Brazil's health care system. Salvador Bahia, Brazil's third-largest city, with 3 million people, has historically been the center of Black social movements in the country, including social movements of women, lesbians, and gay, bisexual, *travesti*, and transgender activists. It is also the city with the greatest health, socioeconomic, and political disparities in Brazil. Falu, who describes herself as Black, queer, feminist, and a cultural anthropologist, has focused her work particularly on Black lesbian women's experience of the gynecological exam as a very specific space where dynamics of gender, sexuality, race, and class are navigated. She refers to the gynecological encounter as a unique kind of social laboratory or social clinic for experiencing and analyzing intersecting systems of power in Brazil.

Prior to studying anthropology, Falu worked for seventeen years as a health care professional in New York and Houston. "When I research and write, I always have both hats on—anthropologist and physician assistant. It has been a benefit to my work to be able to envision what people's clinical situation could be like as women are telling their narratives to me. For the women and the doctors in my study to know that I had this clinical background and could connect to them as an open Black lesbian as well opened many doors.

"The gynecological exam became the central focus of my work from the very beginning. I was familiar with U.S. studies about the invisibility of Black lesbians in the medical literature and medical practice. When I began to talk to Black queer women in Brazil about their experiences of gynecology, their heightened, palpable emotions around the gynecological exam were so charged that I knew I needed to explore what was going on.

"We have so much documentation showing the ways gynecology constructs gender and enforces a heteronormative framework—an assumption of heterosexuality—on patients' sexuality. The more we make clear that those spaces are fraught with systems of power, the easier it will be to break these barriers and improve on these rigid approaches from the medical side and the public health side.

"For instance, as a queer woman I found this fascinating: doctors, mostly White, male, straight doctors in Brazil talking about virginity with Black queer women. Some cisgender heterosexual young women may choose to be virgins for religious reasons or because of their nonmarital status. But for the Black queer women in my study, they understood themselves to be virgins who have sex, just not penetrative sex. They were not celibate. They are virgins because they do not engage in penetrative sex. But that does not negate their sexual desire or other sexual practices.

"The women refused to define virginity in the heteronormative way, even if they might need the same medical treatment that a heterosexual virgin may need. They understood that since they don't have penetrative sex, the insertion of the speculum during the exam could not only be physically painful but also violate their sense of self. But in the gynecological exam, their virginity was seen through the doctors' heteronormative eye and it was seen as deviant. So for me virginity became a site for exploring resistance to prejudice. Virginity was the language by which to talk about different social conditions that include well-being and honoring their relationship to their bodies."

Anthropologist Nessette Falu

Falu understands the experiences of many

of the Black queer women in her study through the lens of trauma, particularly gynecologial trauma.

"The gynecological exam can cause many forms of injury: emotional, physical, and even what I refer to as social injury, because of the ways women have to reorient themselves when they walk out of those spaces and back into their everyday lives after the experience of prejudice.

"In an exam you might expect a physician to do their medical job in a certain way. It's all designed to be clinical. But exams are infused with the social. The doctor may ask about your vacation or comment about hair. But what if the next comment to a Black lesbian woman is 'You should be thinking about having children'? The social message becomes very disruptive, even inappropriate and offensive.

"That causes a kind of injury: the awareness of the doctor's heteronormative assumptions and prejudice toward you both as a Black woman and as a lesbian, their nonnormative gender. That perception, and the anticipation of the way you might be treated can create and evoke a kind of trauma. The anticipation of repeating a social trauma creates some of the most negative consequences. Just that anticipation keeps people from going back and getting exams and that can affect their long-term health."

Falu sees Black lesbian women's engagement with the gynecological process as a form of resistance to a medical system that is prejudiced against them.

"My book is about the beautiful experiments of these women's everyday lives, to draw on a phrase from Saidiya Hartman's recent book (2019). I want to articulate the value of everyday Black life, including those moments in gynecological spaces. It's not just about sexuality. It's about being Black women, Black bodies, Black queer folks. It's about their relationships with their family and the caretaking roles and financial struggles with their partners, or the beautiful moments in their religion, Candomblé. The different ways that they generate knowledge together about health care. How does same-sex desire and even one's relationship to the body through forms of nonnormative desire translate into a defense of well-being and a resistance to emotional trauma? How does this kind of erotic power, embedded in their sexuality and alternative forms of knowledge, unfold within the gynecological exam space?

"My work is both personal and professional. I was already in solidarity with some of my participants before I decided to do fieldwork. To disconnect those parts of me when I started official research didn't make sense. It's just at the core of who I am. All of these different facets of life are critical for us as anthropologists as we chart a methodology for research and writing, understanding an articulating Black living.

> *"All of these different facets of life are critical for us as anthropologists as we chart a methodology for research and writing, understanding and articulating Black living."*

"I often times came out to my physician interlocutors. I also came out to them as a clinician, a physician assistant. Then as a clinician, and as queer and Black, I recognized that the narratives these women told me were very private and very sensitive—so sensitive that they may not even be talking to other women about their experiences. Anything I could do to open up my sense of self with them to make that ethnographic moment comfortable was important to me."

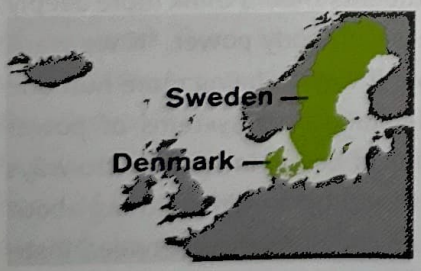
Falu suggests that students should think more deeply about how they themselves embody power. "If we want to change the world, move it toward being more humane and just, we must understand how systems of power work. Many students think of power in such macro ways that they can't imagine that they can do anything about it. We have to understand the difference between institutional power and the ways in which we embody that power. In reality the opportunity to intervene may literally be in our next interaction."

promoting sexual citizenship, including a commitment to a rethought, comprehensive sex education program for young people. As described by students in Hirsch and Khan's study, today's sex education programs commonly present sex as scary and dangerous, focus on sexually transmitted infections and unwanted pregnancies, and encourage abstinence—in sum, they suggest that young people are not ready to become sexual citizens. Few students reported receiving formal instruction about birth control, how to say no to sex, the right to make one's own reproductive decisions, or how to resist peer pressure. Conventional sex education was particularly irrelevant to the sexual experiences and identities of LGBTQ students.

Hirsch and Khan note the importance of shifting these conversations. The average age of one's first sexual encounter in the United States is seventeen, and this number has been stable for about four decades. Overall, young people are actually having less sex. But the average age of marriage, if young people get married at all, has risen significantly: from twenty-three in 1960 to thirty for men and twenty-eight for women today. As a result, a full decade may pass between when young people first have sex and when they get married. Old norms and educational patterns have not prepared young people for sexual citizenship in this new reality. In this context, Hirsch and Khan argue that preparation to be fully empowered sexual citizens is an essential element of both achieving individual sexual self-determination and eliminating sexual assaults on campus.

Sex, Disability, and Social Justice in Denmark and Sweden

Anthropologists Don Kulick and Jens Rydstrom explore the intersections of state power and sexuality in their book *Loneliness and Its Opposite: Sex, Disability, and the Ethics of Engagement* (2015), focusing on the constraints on and potential for sexuality among severely disabled people in Denmark and Sweden. In recent decades, the disability rights movement has successfully advocated for access to physical spaces, jobs, social services, and other public arenas where people with disabilities have commonly faced discrimination and marginalization. But the more private realm of the erotic lives of people with disabilities has often been ignored or viewed with discomfort or anxiety. Should a person with severe disabilities hope to have a meaningful sex life? And how can that be possible for someone who needs assistance to perform most basic life activities, such as eating, bathing, and going to the bathroom?



MAP 8.4
Denmark and Sweden

Denmark and Sweden are two liberal welfare states with similar cultural histories, considered to be sexually progressive and at the forefront of the global movement for disability rights. Both countries commit significant portions of their budgets to social services (30 percent) and provide disability pensions, housing in group homes, or personal assistance to those who desire to live

"I want a family—a marriage, children, the whole thing. 'Family' is happy is strong." Nick Hogan of Australia, one of an estimated 7 million people around the world with Down syndrome. What can we do to support people with disabilities as they form attachments with other people, including attachments that involve sexual pleasure and love?

independently. But these two neighboring countries take distinctly different approaches to the erotic lives of people with disabilities. In Denmark, their sexuality is acknowledged, discussed, and facilitated. In Sweden, as in the overwhelming majority of countries around the world, the erotic lives of people with disabilities are denied, repressed, and discouraged. Their desires for sexual pleasure are ignored. These adults with disabilities are commonly treated as children whose erotic desires and sexual behaviors are seen as inappropriate or even dangerous to their own well-being.

Kulick and Rydstrom's study focuses specifically on severely disabled people, including those with intellectual and physical disabilities, limited mobility in their limbs, and limited verbal language abilities who live in group homes. In Sweden, staff are trained to discourage the erotic lives of their residents, to never "wake the sleeping bear" (that is, to avoid all mention of sexuality), and to shut down erotic feelings when they do arise. In stark contrast, the group homes in Denmark promote welcoming attitudes and affirmative policies regarding

sex. Denmark supports a network of advocates, sexual advisors, social workers, medical professionals, educators, and counselors who work toward recognizing and facilitating the sexual desires and practices of people with disabilities. The government sponsors an eighteen-month training course to become a sexual advisor. An elaborate set of national recommendations, *Guidelines about Sexuality—Regardless of Handicap*, discusses how these advisors can help people with disabilities engage in such activities as having sex with a partner, masturbation, or purchasing sexual services from a sex worker.

Ultimately, Kulick and Rydstrom are most interested in the impact of state policies on the lives of women and men with disabilities and their potential to develop, explore, and thrive as sexual human beings. Kulick and Rydstrom frame this as an ethical question—a matter of social justice. What can we do to support people with disabilities as they form attachments with other people, including attachments that involve sexual pleasure and love? And how can we foster the circumstances that allow each individual to realize a life of human dignity? This, Kulick and Rydstrom argue, is the true measure of a just society.

How Does Globalization Influence Local Expressions of Sexuality?

» Assess how globalization is affecting individual expressions and local understandings of sexuality.

Local understandings of sexuality are undergoing dramatic shifts as they intersect with national, regional, and international economic policies, immigration practices, and political movements influenced by processes of globalization (see Curtis 2009). For example, time-space compression (see Chapter 1) is facilitating the movement of people—particularly men—within countries and across national borders in search of sexual pleasure. In addition, disruptions of local economies are pushing women to find wage labor to support themselves and their families. And international campaigns for gay and lesbian rights, often initiated in Western countries, are shaping a global conversation about sexuality and the human rights of sexual minorities worldwide. At the same time, groups opposing gay and lesbian sexuality are promoting their own agendas on a global platform.

The following studies offer insights into the intersection of the local and global when it comes to sexuality. This is an arena that most of us view as deeply personal but that today crosses national borders in the company of economic flows, immigrant journeys, international tourism, and global rights campaigns.

Beach Resorts, Dominican Women, and Sex Work

The current era of globalization has seen a dramatic rise in **sex tourism**—trips organized through the tourism sector to facilitate commercial sexual relationships between tourists and local residents in destinations around the world, such as Brazil, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Kenya, the Philippines, and Thailand. Built on the infrastructure of the tourism industry (including airlines, hotels, restaurants, and local transportation), today, sex tourism involves millions of sex workers in a multibillion-dollar industry.

Cultural anthropologist Denise Brennan's ethnography *What's Love Got to Do with It?* (2004) explores the impact of globalization on Sosua, a beautiful beach town on the northern coast of the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean. Sosua has become a prime destination for White male European sex tourists. Internet advertisements and chat rooms draw them in with images of beautiful beaches, luxurious accommodations, and inexpensive sex with Afro-Caribbean island women. The globalized tourism industry provides a seamlessly integrated product, as package tours purchased in Europe bundle airfare, hotels, meals, and entertainment. Corporate owners of resort hotels are frequently the same foreign airline companies that recruit and deliver tourists to Sosua.

Yet the booming industry does not benefit everyone. Despite the allure of development through globalization, little of the sex tourism money reaches local Dominican hotels, restaurants, or other businesses. Local workers still toil for low wages while European nationals are brought in by the resorts to fill well-paid management positions. Over the years, the well-funded foreign tourist hotels have largely undermined the local tourist industry: They monopolize tourists' expenditures by providing all-inclusive package tours, thereby depriving local businesses of income from the tourist trade. In fact, most of the tourist money never leaves the travel companies' home bank accounts in Europe.

Sosua also attracts young women who migrate from across the Dominican Republic to seek opportunities through the sex trade that flourishes around the luxury hotels. These mostly poor, rural, Black women hope to reap some of the benefits of globalization, too, through **sex work**—that is, providing commercial sexual services to foreign tourists. If White European sex tourists have fantasies of sexual pleasure with exotic Dominican women, the women of the Dominican Republic have their own

sex tourism: Travel, usually organized through the tourism sector, to facilitate commercial sexual relations between tourists and local residents in destinations around the world.

MAP 8.5
Dominican Republic

sex work: Labor through which one provides sexual services for money.

A European tourist walks with a local woman along a strip of nightclubs and hotels in the beach resort of Boca Chica, Dominican Republic, known as a hot spot for commercial sex tourism.

fantasies. They believe that the money they earn will help release them and their families from the hardships of life in their largely rural, underdeveloped country. Even more fantastical, they hope to marry one of these tourist men—who they imagine will help them acquire a European visa, take them away, and enable them to escape their world of poverty and limited opportunities. If they can find romance along the way, all the better.

Brennan describes how sex work is more than a survival strategy for these women. Sosua's sex workers have developed an advancement strategy. In essence, they are working to make the transnational links created by foreign investment come alive for themselves just as they do for the European tourists. Brennan's careful storytelling depicts women who are not powerless victims of sexual violence and exploitation in the sex tourism industry; instead, they actively attempt to create a better life for themselves through it.

Unfortunately, the globalization deck seems stacked against these women. For one thing, prostitution is not legal in the Dominican Republic. With no legal protections, sex workers are vulnerable to extortion and harassment by local police. On a larger scale, globalization affects sex tourists and sex workers in radically different ways, providing completely different possibilities for fulfilling their fantasies. Marriage, a visa to Europe, and financial security rarely materialize for the women in Sosua. Instead, globalization as expressed through sex tourism reproduces and reinforces unequal relations between men and women of different nationalities. In doing so, it also reinforces inequality along lines of gender, race, class, and nationality. At its roots, sex tourism relies on these inequalities of the globalized economy to satisfy the fantasies of tourists from developed countries and to maximize profits for corporate shareholders.

Globalization, Sexuality, and the Migration of Mexican Gay Men

Migration across the U.S.–Mexico border has dominated the news in recent years. But the intense focus on border walls, migrant caravans, and drug smuggling obscures the actual lives, journeys, and motivations of the immigrants themselves. How do we move beyond stereotypes and political rhetoric to understand the impact of globalization on the lives of people on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border?

In *Pathways of Desire: The Sexual Migration of Mexican Gay Men* (2018), Héctor Carrillo illuminates the lives of gay Mexican men and the journeys that take them to the United States, an aspect of migration that has largely fallen outside social science research and popular debate. Through interviews with 150 gay men and participant observation in places where they socialize, Carrillo and his team trace the men's migration journeys from life in the towns and villages of Mexico to their arrival and incorporation in the gay community of Hillcrest

MAP 8.6
Hillcrest, San Diego, California and Mexico

in San Diego, California. How does sexuality shape their migration? How does migration shape their sexuality?

Discussions of gender and sexuality in the scholarly literature about Mexican migration to the United States have mainly focused on heterosexual migrants. Heterosexual men move for work opportunities. Their journeys represent rites of passage that mark their masculinity, ambition, and worthiness as marriage partners. Heterosexual women seek reunification with relatives—parents, husbands, children—who preceded them on the cross-border journey. Or, as seen in more recent studies, women migrate to gain autonomy and to challenge the entrenched patterns of gender inequality that characterize their relationships with their husbands, boyfriends, and fathers.

For the men in Carrillo's study, whom he refers to as sexual migrants, sexual motivations for migration intertwine with desires for economic advancement and family reunification. Despite Mexico's growing gay communities, gay men consistently point to their desire to live a fully gay life and experience a kind of sexual freedom that would be hard to achieve at home.

Gay migrants often rely on the same social and family networks and resources that heterosexual migrants use to facilitate their journeys. Immigration scholars often note a culture of migration (see Chapter 13) that develops in certain communities as more residents relocate within countries or across borders. Money and messages sent back home, along with return visits by successful immigrants, spur the imagination of other residents. New financial resources and new social capital—networks of friends, family, and fellow villagers already in the United States; knowledge about migration routes; and strategies for incorporation into U.S. communities—motivate more people, especially young people, to move.

The Hillcrest neighborhood of San Diego, California, has become a safe haven for its gay residents and for gay Latino migrants to the United States. Here, a restaurant flies rainbow flags to express its support for the LGBTQ community.

But gay Mexican men also draw on alternative resources, what Carrillo calls a "gay culture of migration," that include LGBTQ+ social networks in Mexico and the United States. Through them, sexual migrants activate gay and lesbian acquaintances, friends, boyfriends, and sex partners to access a kind of "gay social capital" to facilitate travel, meet human smugglers, find housing and jobs, and obtain information about the U.S. legal and health care systems.

Carrillo notes the central role of Hillcrest, a neighborhood in San Diego, as a safe

landing place for new immigrants and a key site for mobilizing such social capital. Gay friends and acquaintances play a crucial role as cultural ambassadors, helping new arrivals learn about Latino gay support groups, gay dance clubs and bathhouses, the Metropolitan Community Church (a nondenominational LGBTQ+ church with congregations throughout the United States and abroad), gay Catholic groups, and health services (including HIV/AIDS treatment and support groups).

In Hillcrest, new arrivals also begin the process of becoming sexual citizens, understanding and enacting their sexual rights and duties in a new country and community. The neighborhood's many rainbow flags, gay bars, and other cultural institutions provide a setting in which gay men can openly hold hands without fear of harassment, violence, or arrest. This public expression of same-sex intimacy marks a new political framework of freedom, belonging, and acceptance that many have not previously experienced. At the same time, traveling outside San Diego, new arrivals quickly find that not all of the United States is like Hillcrest. Homophobia and anti-gay violence are not uncommon. Full participation in their community is further limited by their undocumented status, encounters with racial prejudice, and their ever-present vulnerability to arrest and deportation.

Immigrants transform the cultures where they settle. The same is true of the Mexican men in Carrillo's study, who identify sexual passion as the unique characteristic they bring to intimate relationships with White American gay men. They trace this trait to Mexican culture, particularly their upbringing in close-knit families where the group's needs come before the individual's needs and where unity, connection, and respect are central to daily life and survival. In contrast, they find White American gay men to be calculating, detached, and even shallow in their interpersonal relationships. This they link to the erosion of American family values in a highly materialistic and individualistic culture. Mexican gay migrants wear their reputation as passionate, intimate lovers as a badge of honor as they interact sexually and romantically with "the locals" in San Diego. And as vulnerable immigrants with limited power to shape their own lives, they also wield it as a tool for critiquing the mainstream American culture they are working so hard to join.

Globalization has propelled Western norms of sexuality around the world. But Carrillo's study reveals how cross-border migration flows—also stimulated by globalization—are reshaping sexuality in the San Diego gay community, as Mexican gay migrants bring unique perspectives on sexuality from their home communities to the United States and into the global gay landscape. The actual lives of migrants, in this case sexual migrants, reveal deeper complexities of globalization, the immigrant journey, and the contributions of gay Mexican men to creating both local and global gay cultures.

In this chapter, we have considered the vast scope and diversity of human sexuality across cultures, time, and space. The sexual dimensions of human diversity in turn challenge us to expand our imaginations about the potential for human sexuality available to us. But as we have seen throughout this chapter, human sexuality is more than the personal choices we make about our sexual partners and how we express our erotic desires. The anthropological lens and a global perspective have enabled us to see that sexuality encompasses complex relationships not only between individuals but also between individuals and the larger culture. We have examined how elements of human sexuality are culturally constructed—formed in relationship to particular people, cultural norms, and expectations. Rather than representing sharply drawn, fixed, and oppositional identities that align with two discrete categories, sexuality is diverse, flexible, and fluid.

We have also seen that the construction of human sexuality—how it is perceived and valued—is a highly contested process. Debates rage and decisions are made about human sexuality that affect people's life chances and access to power, privileges, rights, and resources. Certain rights or benefits may be granted or restricted based on assumptions about sexual preferences or sexual behavior. Given this reality, sexuality has become a key cultural location within anthropology for analyzing, understanding, and contesting systems of stratification and inequality, including those that arise from sexuality's intersections with other systems of power, such as race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, religion, kinship, and class.

Thinking Like an Anthropologist: Sexuality in Your Life

Sexuality is all around us. Turn on the television, search the Internet, check out at the grocery store, or drive down an interstate highway, and you will find sexuality all around you in reality shows, websites, magazines, and billboard advertisements. At times, the presence of sexuality in U.S. culture is so pervasive as to be overwhelming. In such an environment, how do you begin to make sense of what sexuality means for you on a personal level and for U.S. culture on a political level?

Remember to consider the big questions that have organized this chapter:

- What is sexuality and where does it come from?
- What is the scope of human sexuality when seen in a global perspective?
- How has sexuality been constructed in the United States?
- How is sexuality an arena for working out relations of power?
- How does globalization influence local expressions of sexuality?

Think again about the story that opens this chapter. In what ways do sexuality and power intersect on your college campus? If, as anthropologist Eric Wolf argues (see Chapter 2), every relationship is embedded in complex dynamics of power, how do you navigate intersections of sexuality with gender, age, class, race, or religion? Has your college or university created opportunities to discuss matters of sexuality?

Certainly, attention to sexual violence on college campuses has increased. Terms such as *date rape* and *domestic violence* have become part of the national conversation, and many colleges and universities have implemented policies on sexual harassment and sexual conduct. Still, many women experience sexual harassment, violence, and rape while in college (Fisher, Daigle, and Cullen 2010; Hirsch and Khan 2020; Sanday 1990). While these policies attempt to address extreme expressions of the intersection of power with sexuality, conversations about sexuality can be far more wide-ranging.

Until recently, most sexual offense policies have been based on the assumption that *no* means *no*. Most legal definitions of rape have assumed that if a person does not consent or is incapable of consent for any reason, then any sexual activity with them is considered rape. Now, newer affirmative consent policies that define consent as an ongoing process require intimate partners to obtain verbal consent at each new level of physical intimacy.

An affirmative consent policy requires a dramatic shift in thinking about intimate sexual encounters. It also commands a new attention to shifting the power dynamics that underlie current patterns of gender and sexuality in the culture at large. Imagine if all forms of coercion—physical and psychological coercion; the pressures of norms, obligations, and expectations; and the fear of ridicule or abandonment—were removed from the equation, enabling people to engage in sexual intimacy only when they really wanted to. What if *yes* really meant *yes* (Friedman and Valenti 2008)?

Although anthropology may not be able to help you decide whom to date or when to do what and where, it does offer a set of tools—perspectives and insights—that may help you think more clearly about what it all means, identify the cultural frameworks within which you

negotiate your desires and decisions, and imagine what your full range of options may be when you consider your sexuality within a global perspective. Questions of sexuality run deep in U.S. cultural conversations. Having thought through key issues of sexuality from an anthropological perspective, are you better prepared to engage in the debates and advance the conversation?

Key Terms

sexuality (p. 282)
sex tourism (p. 309)
sex work (p. 309)

For Further Exploration

City of Joy. https://cityofjoycongo.org. Hundreds of thousands of women in eastern Congo have been victimized by wartime rape. This website includes videos, photographs, and descriptions of women's efforts to break the cycle of violence in the Congo and to establish a women's shelter and leadership training school.

The Education of Shelby Knox. 2005. Directed by Marion Lipschutz and Rose Rosenblatt. Cine Qua Non/InCite Pictures. Documentary about a teenager from a Southern Baptist family in Lubbock, Texas, who takes a True Love Waits (chastity) pledge but eventually becomes an activist for comprehensive sex education.

"Go Ask Alice!" Columbia University. https://goaskalice.columbia.edu. Columbia University's health service website provides reliable and accessible information about health, including sexuality, sexual health, and relationships.

It Gets Better Project. www.itgetsbetter.org. This website was created by sex advice columnist Dan Savage with his partner, Terry Miller, in the wake of several well-publicized cases of young people who were bullied into suicide. Intended to inspire hope for LGBTQ+ youth facing harassment, the site features videos of moral support from political figures and entertainers who remind teenagers tormented by others about their sexuality that it indeed does get better.

LaFont, Suzanne. 2002. *Constructing Sexualities: Readings in Sexuality, Gender and Culture*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Schwartz, Pepper, and Virginia Rutter. 1998. *The Gender of Sexuality: Exploring Sexual Possibilities*. Lanham, MD: Altamira Press.

Southern Comfort. 2001. Directed by Kate Davis. Next Wave Films. A poignant documentary about the life of Robert Eads, a transgender man living in rural Georgia. The painful tragedy of Eads's story is that he is dying of ovarian cancer and is denied treatment by two dozen doctors who feared harm to their reputations.